

January 17, 2007

Representative Koopman and members of the House State Education Committee:

I write to urge your support of HB 164, which provides a tax deduction incentive for those who volunteer instructional services in schools. At Monforton School District 27, an independent K-8 elementary district in the Four Corners area of Bozeman, we have difficulty finding qualified teachers in part-time positions, such as music, band and instructional aides. We also have difficulty find competent substitute teachers. Last year, in a recruiting effort to hire a band teacher, I had two very interested, retired, but still certified, former band instructors. I believe if this tax deduction incentive had been in place, my recruiting effort may have been successful.

Monforton School was the site of the first school-based mentoring program in Montana. We have retired teachers, professors, physicians, military officers, etc. who work with our students. The relationships that are formed with our students who are most in need, or most gifted, and these volunteers are rich and long lasting. For our students who are poor and gifted, these relationships are crucial for getting out of poverty.

Incentives provided in HB 164 both welcome and respect the dignity of those who are able and interested in volunteering in schools. It is worthy of your consideration.

Lynne Scalia
Superintendent and Principal
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January 26, 2005

Dear House Education Committee Members:

I am writing to support House Bill 404. Bozeman School District has a rich tradition of using volunteers in our schools and Representative Koopman's bill will allow us to enhance that even more while providing a mechanism for current teachers to benefit.

Our community has a high percentage of highly educated people that have a great deal to offer in the development of our students. Offering them a tax deduction for volunteering will likely increase our ability to use volunteers to enrich the student's educational experience. We do not foresee that this bill will displace any of our teachers, but may allow us to develop and maintain programs that our students otherwise would not have access to. One such program that we have used volunteers for in the past is K-5 foreign language. The program was offered to our students in the late 1990's but was eliminated because it became very difficult to recruit volunteers. The benefits of that program are being seen today in our high school as witnessed by the high number of students taking Advanced Placement foreign language classes. An incentive like the one proposed in this bill would have helped greatly in the recruitment of volunteers and possibly kept the program alive.

Under the bill, the savings generated from the volunteers will be used to enhance teacher salaries. We are in the process of studying an alternative salary schedule for our teachers and this bill may provide a source of funding for any adopted plan. As you are aware offering a competitive salary to teachers is a challenge that every district in Montana faces. Even though I do not envision this as the ultimate solution to that challenge, every little bit helps.

I hope that the discussion on this bill centers on enhancing the opportunities for students and not its effect on adults. Thank you for your dedication to the State of Montana and its students.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Johnson
Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations

**Monforton School District
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January 25, 2005

The Honorable Roger Koopman

Dear Mr. Koopman:

As principal and superintendent of an independent K-8 public school district in the Four Corners area of Bozeman, Montana, I submit the following for your consideration concerning HB 404.

I am a public school educator who has utilized the services of volunteers in a number of capacities for the benefit of the students in my care. Recognizing the increasingly important role volunteers have come to play in the education of children, I support the provision of a tax deduction given to those who work without compensation in the school district.

In the Monforton School District, I see the role of volunteers as contributing to the instructional program, not displacing teachers or paid classified staff, but rather allowing further instructional and support role opportunities. For example, Monforton does not currently have a foreign language program at the elementary level. With the volunteer tax credit, I may have a greater chance of recruiting a teacher, thereby offering a program I would not have dreamed of considering, owing to financial constraints. Similarly, Monforton discontinued the Gifted and Talented program for the 2004-2005 school year, again, due to financial constraints. The teacher was reassigned. Committed volunteers could rebuild this program, if they had clearer and better-defined roles and expectations from their employers.

A final example is, as a former principal of a Reading First school, I found that "direct instruction" reading interventions are highly effective in tutorial-type small groups. As these direct instruction programs are well structured, scripted and progress easily measured (ex. SRA Corrective Reading), volunteers are easily trained and supervision is straightforward. Students able to work in this way in a group of 2-4 make enormous gains – enough gains to close significant reading gaps (can provide data *Fall, '04-Winter, '05, Monforton Reading Assessments*). A competent, reliable volunteer workforce can make such gains happen in a school.

There is potential for innovative and useful partnerships between schools and volunteers in HB 404. If I may be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,